

## Arts in Healthcare delivers results

*This is excerpted from a video speech given by Arni Fishbaugh, director of the Montana Arts Council, at a luncheon meeting convened in Missoula by Living Art of Montana.*

The Montana Arts Council is so very proud of our association with Living Art of Montana and all the incredible work they have done over the years. Today, I'd like to talk to you about the intersection of the arts and healthcare.

When I talk about the arts, I'm speaking about not only visual arts, but music, dance, theatre, writing, design, crafts, photographs and all forms of the arts.

Many people say, "The arts are great – but they don't have much to do with my life." In fact, that couldn't be further from the truth. If you think about it, everything you touch, see or hear, except that created by nature, involves the arts.

The music you listen to each day on your iPod, on the radio or at the theater is created by composers, lyricists and musicians; the newspapers, magazines and books you read in print or online are all forms of literature; the TV, videos and movies we watch are scripted, designed, directed and performed by performers, writers and musicians.

Our cell phones, coffee mugs, lawnmowers and the rockets we send into space – all are products that began as designs by artists. So you see, the arts – like water, shelter and food – are an essential part of our lives.

The arts spark the creativity that transforms us and gives us our sense of identity. The arts and creativity lead to discovery. They engage us and help us express our human voice. The arts allow us to be seen, heard, remembered and valued.

One of the newest areas of importance that is coming to light in recent years is the arts and its value in the healthcare field.

It's interesting to remember that throughout recorded history many of humankind's healing rituals have centered around dance, song, stories, music and drama. While modern-day medicine is astonishing in its advancements, both scientifically and technologically, a person still has to heal thyself.

Research shows that the arts utilized in healthcare settings:

- Reduce lengths of hospital stays;
- Decrease need for multiple medical visits;
- Reduce reports of pain and anxiety related to illness and invasive treatment;
- Increase self-esteem and reduce stress;

- Reduce healthcare-related infection rates;
- Decrease need for use of sedatives during medical procedures;
- Reduce levels of depression; and
- Improve the quality of life.

One of my favorite stories is from one of my staff members, whose son wanted to study pre-med at Carroll College. When he asked his advisor about majors, he was told by his college advisor, "I'd rather see a new medical student with an undergraduate degree in art history than biology or chemistry. We can learn science but the specialized talents and skills of observations are what get us to diagnosis and healing. These skills are taught better in art classes."

Nationally, arts organizations and healthcare companies are beginning to take these facts seriously:

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations [JCAHO] surveyed approved medical facilities in the U.S. and found that half of them have some type of arts in healthcare programs.

The national organization, Americans for the Arts, states, "An investment in arts in health is an investment in America's health."

The National Endowment for the Arts has a strategic goal to "increase the integration of arts in healthcare."

Montana is "graying" at a faster rate than most other states. We are also seeing an influx of retirees and self-employed people who will probably also retire here because of our cultural and environmental assets.

Life expectancy is increasing and medications to prolong cognitive and physical wellness offer both joys and concerns as those of us in community development areas look to how to keep those lives vibrant and vital. Again, the arts offer solutions.

The Montana Arts Council is proud to be selected as one of 13 states involved with the National Center for Creative Aging, an offshoot of the President's Council on Aging. This work is dedicated to fostering an understanding of the vital relationship between creative expression and healthy aging.

Three years ago our agency undertook a major first-ever study to develop a baseline in the state of arts in healthcare in Montana, surveying artists, arts organizations, healthcare providers and health administrators in hospitals and clinics.

We found that 86% of direct-care providers and administrators believe the arts can reduce patient stress and anxiety levels. And a majority of them also indicate the arts can increase patient, family and caregiver satisfaction.

The Montana Arts Council wants us all to get serious about promoting the obvious benefits of the arts in healthcare and look for meaningful ways for much greater integration.

I'd like to ask each of you to think, "What is one thing I could do today to carry the conversation forward?"

Living Art is the perfect "go-to" resource in Missoula.

#### A personal story

Kim Baraby Hurtle on our staff oversees our involvement in arts and healthcare. She has a view on the value of the arts in healthcare from a very personal perspective.

Ten years ago she almost died from a staph infection in her pacemaker. She was in intensive care for over two months, and in a coma for a month. We all had serious concerns whether she would make it.

I asked her to share her story about how the arts helped her in her remarkable recovery process, and here is what she said:

"As a patient with congenital heart defects, I've spent my share of time in state-of-the-art hospitals and world-renowned clinics. I've come to appreciate the artwork in these centers and the fact that the art is placed wherever patients might need to take a breath and need a moment of bolstering.

"Just such a place would be a dressing room, where patients don the proverbial blue snowflake gown before submitting to a difficult testing procedure. The knowledge on the part of hospital designers, or lack thereof, that a grayed-lavender wall color relaxes patients where a bright yellow brings anxiety can be critical for all involved.

"My favorite stories of art in hospitals began for me as I woke up from a coma. Staff, alongside my family, tried to convince me that I was now in a Seattle hospital after being transported there from Helena. As I drifted in and out of consciousness, I would hear snippets of conversation and few thought that I was hearing or understanding.

"One morning, my sister Karen walked into the room. She said, 'Have you guys walked on the floor that sounds a chiming of bells?'

'Or, seen the amazing metal horse sculpture in the main lobby?' my daughter Blake offered.

"I replied, 'Patrick Zentz and Deborah Butterfield. Montana artists.' These facts were checked out and reported to the doctors caring for me.

"I'd said my first sensible words in almost three weeks. I'd never been to this hospital, but the information I offered showed a variety of cognitive abilities they feared I'd lost in the grave infection I had contracted during a pacemaker replacement.

"After more weeks of surgery and therapies, my rewards for accomplishments were to leave the ICU floor, and then the Cardiac Care floor, to visit the art I had described and see the entire collection. I realized that art was purchased for the collection from all the states

that sent their most critical patients to the University of Washington Medical Center.

"I was taken to healing gardens where the sunshine hit my face for the first time in month and a half. My patient room had art on the wall, which became a focal point during pain and disappointments. I was brought to an art therapy class where my family and I made beautiful things.

"I learned to walk while pushing my wheelchair around the eighth floor Rehab Unit. Each time I made the loop, I'd come to Montana artist Ernie Pepion's painting of hunting buffalo from his wheelchair.

"All the artwork on that floor was made by former patients, I discovered. Even the ceiling tiles in our rooms there were decorated with messages from former patients wishing us courage.

"As an artist and patient, I was inspired and comforted by the art and arts programming, and by the staff and the foundations that saw the need for this important aspect of the healing process."

– Kim Baraby Hurtle

Kim has said repeatedly, "When it comes to the arts and healing in the state of Montana, Living Art is a leader. As an organized group with a track record, Living Art is IT." Not only is it "IT," but it also does work the arts council considers model practice.

Living Art's work touches people on a profound and meaningful level in ways that are transformative.

Thanks again for giving the Montana Arts Council an opportunity to be a part of this important discussion.